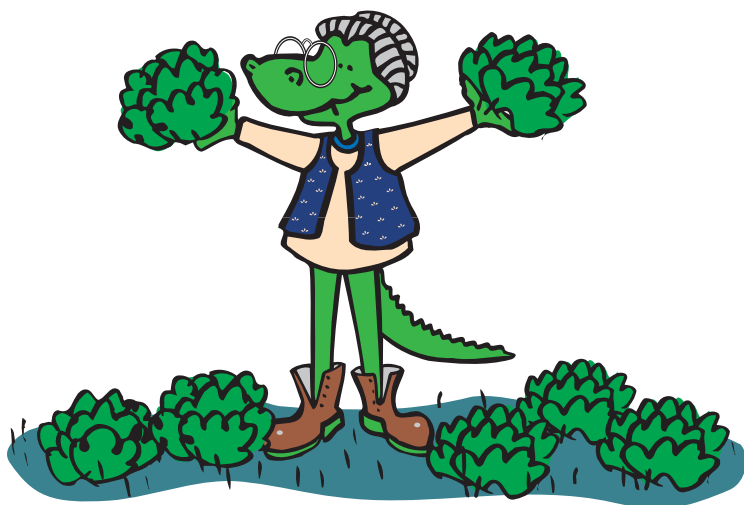


Granny Bootz Comes to Visit

The Search for Swamp Cabbage

**Written & Illustrated
by
Dean Bagley**



Baggy Gator sat in his easy chair and watched a small tornado come storming through his living room. It was his nephew, Little Nipper, who ran outside to the mailbox, grabbed the mail and hurried back inside.

As his windswept trail blew by uncle Baggy, he yelled, “Mail call, unca Baggy,” and continued on as the letters came drifting down, scattering across the floor.



Baggy leaned over to view the envelopes and began sorting out the bills from the letters.

The first letter was from his sister, Snipper, who was still trying to do a second honeymoon with her husband, Biff. Their previous attempts, such as the trip to Niagara Swamp, failed. Someone had drained the swamp.

Nipper was staying with uncle Baggy while they wandered the globe, searching for a suitable honeymoon spot. This letter informed Baggy that Nipper was not leaving any time soon.

The next letter was from Granny Bootz, a distant aunt of his from the Ozark mountains. Her real name is Geneva Gator, but everyone calls her Granny. She wears combat boots to protect her feet while in the mountains, so someone nicknamed her Granny Bootz.

“Hello, nephew!” she growled, for a start of her letter.

“I’m coming to Florida for a special project, and I knew you’d be glad to put me up.

Don’t make special arrangements or try cleaning your house. It won’t impress me, because I know how you really are messy. I’m arriving in a few days.

By the way, ask around as to where you can get some swamp cabbage.

Love & kisses, growls & hisses . . .

Granny”

Baggy’s eyes went blank as he laid the letter down. Sort of a vacant look. A project? What project? What was she going to do?

And what about swamp cabbage? Where did that fit into the scheme of things? Was she on a special diet?

Just then, the doorbell rang. Now, who could that be, thought Baggy. Maybe it was Granny Bootz. He opened the door.

It wasn’t Granny, it was his best buddy, Lillia DiValli, dressed in her usual 1960’s styled clothing.



“Hi, Lillia,” greeted Baggy. “What’s up? What brings you here?”

“I’m taking Little Nipper to the zoo to see their new arrivals,” Lillia answered. “They just got some gnus.”

“Oh, well I hope it’s good news,” agreed Baggy.

“Not news! Gnus,” rumbled Lillia.

Baggy bumped his ears with the palms of his hands. He wasn’t sure if he was hearing correctly.

“Must be the wind,” said Baggy. “I think I’m hearing an echo. Did you just say ‘news, news?’”

Lillia’s brow furrowed in a peeved look. “I’m talking about the African beasts, gnus! G N U S,” she boomed.



“Oh. . .” said Baggy. He had never heard of gnus. “Well, if they’re in fine health, they’ll be good gnus. Ha ha,” he said, making light of the subject.

Lillia pursed her lips and stared at Baggy. Then she spoke in a quiet, steady tone. “Do you or don’t you want to go with us to the zoo?”

“Well, I’m expecting a relative, Granny Bootz, and I think I had better stay here until she arrives,” replied Baggy.

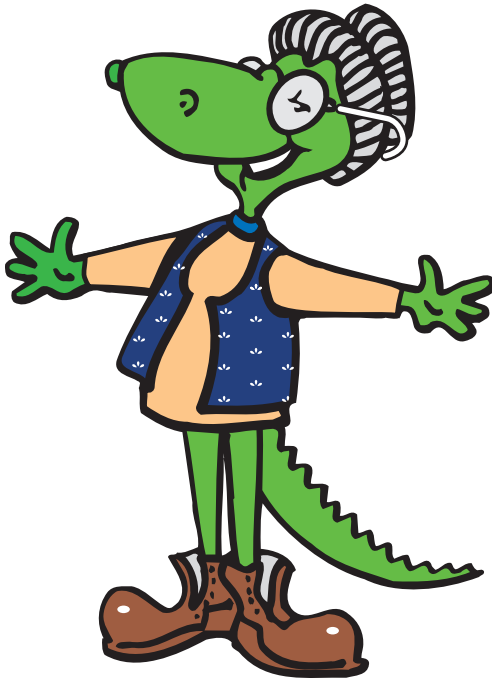
Nipper came running up to the door. “Hi, aunt Lillia. I’m ready to go to the zoo.”

Lillia turned to go with Nipper. “I’ll have him back this afternoon,” she said. “Bye.”

“Bye, unca Baggy,” shouted Nipper, as they disappeared down the sidewalk, heading for the zoo.

As Baggy stood waving good-bye, another figure had gotten out of a taxi, and was walking up the sidewalk to his house. It was Granny Bootz. She was carrying a suitcase with one hand and waving with the other.

“Hello, nephew,” she whooped.



Baggy did not expect her arriving so quickly. He motioned to the front door. “Uh, hi Granny. Come on in and . . .”

Granny shot past him into the house, ignoring his invite.

“No time to waste, I have to get my project goin’, then get back to Whopping Gator Mountain, in time for the county fair.”

Granny Bootz thumbed through the phone book, then picked up the phone and dialed a number.

“Navi-gator’s Expeditionary Emporium,” answered the voice. “We’ll get you there, one way or another. Navi-gator speaking.”

“Navi-gator,” roared Granny into the phone.

“I need somebody to fly me around.”

“I’m just the gator who can do it, young lady. You tell me when and where, and I’ll get you there,” cheered Navi-gator, happily.

“My name is Granny Bootz. Where do I go to get your ride?”



“Do you know the local city airport?” asked Navi-gator.

“Yes,” said Granny, “where all the planes are. Is that where I go?”

“Well, you can, but I won’t be there,” replied Navi-gator.

“Why not?”

“Because I’m not there. I’m here.”

“So, where’s ‘here?’” yelled Granny, impatiently.

“I live out in the swamp. I have my own airplane hangar and runway.”

Navi-gator gave Granny directions on how to get to his airport.

“We’ll be there in fifteen minutes,” yipped Granny. She turned and yelled, “Baggy. . . Baggy Gator!”

Baggy was standing right behind her. He jumped two feet off the ground as she turned and bellowed.

“Yes, Granny,” he replied as he came back to earth.

“Oh, I didn’t know you were there. Don’t sneak up on me like that,” snapped Granny.

“What’s up? What did you call me for?” asked Baggy.

“Nephew, I need a ride to Navi-gator’s swampy airport. I told him we’d be there in fifteen minutes. Let’s go,” she barked.

Baggy shrugged his shoulders in an ‘Oh well’ manner, and followed her to the car.

Exactly fifteen minutes later, Granny and Baggy arrived at Navi-gator’s airport. There was a wooden house, an office, a shoddy looking hangar, and several biplanes sitting around.

Navi-gator saw them and came out of his office, putting on his flying helmet and goggles, wrapping his scarf around his neck.



“Glad you could make it, young lady, and you, too, whoever you are,” welcomed Navi-gator.

“This is my nephew, Baggy Gator, he’s here to help,” said Granny.

“Ah, fine lad, fine lad,” mumbled Navi-gator as he led them out to the field where he kept his biplane.

“Yep,” said Navi-gator, “she’s been a good plane. Always gets me where I’m going. Hop in.”

Baggy and Granny looked up at the plane.

“Hop in, how?” asked Granny.

“Oh, first you climb up on the wing. Then you hoist yourself up to my pilot’s seat. From there you sorta crawl over to your passenger seat. Easy.”

Granny scrambled up on the wing, hoisted herself to the pilot seat, then maneuvered over to the passenger seat. She looked down at Baggy, and shouted, “Well, come on, nephew. We need to get going. Hurry up!”



Baggy managed to join Granny, but he didn't go so quickly as she did, or with such acrobatic ease. They both buckled themselves into their seats.

Navi-gator moved to the front of the plane and took hold of the propeller. He planted his feet on the ground, and gave the propeller a good spin. With that, the engine coughed and sputtered, whining and chugging as it cranked up.

He then climbed up to the cockpit, buckled himself in, and let off the brake. The plane taxied out to the runway where he throttled the engine and . . . they were off!

"Young lady," yelled Navi-gator over the roar of the engine, "may I ask you a question?"

Granny leaned forward and yelled back, "Shoot."

"Where are we going?"

"We need to find a wild supply of swamp cabbage. I've got to have some for a juice recipe. Do you know where it grows?"

"Swamp cabbage, swamp cabbage, hmmm," mumbled Navi-gator. "Maybe it grows in the swamp?"

Baggy rolled his eyes at this conversation.

"Yes," shouted Granny. "The swamp. Fly over the swamp."

"Which way is the swamp?" asked Navi-gator.

"I don't know," groaned Granny. "You live here. Don't you know?"

"It's one thing to live somewhere. It's another to know how to get there," said Navi-gator. "I've never had to go here, because I've always been here."

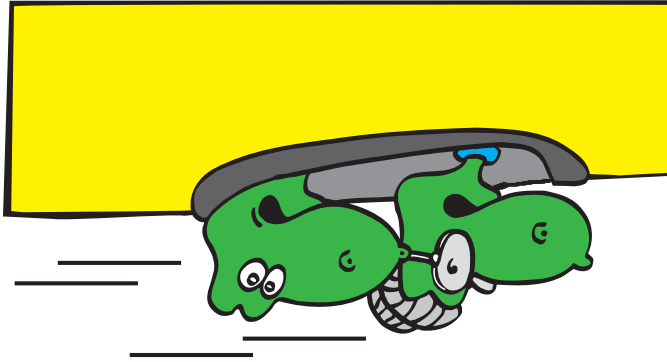
Baggy again rolled his eyes at this comment. He was hoping he would make it back home safely.

"Don't you live in the swamp?" Granny screamed over the noise of the plane.

"Yes," said Navi-gator.

"Then we're already there. Just fly around your house and its neighboring surroundings," yelled Granny, who, along with Baggy, was rolling her eyes in dismay.

The engine whined and sputtered as Navi-gator dipped and swooped the plane. It was lucky for them that they had their seat-belts on. They were suddenly upside down.



Navi-gator swooped again, and they were rightside up. He pointed to a field of greenery below.

“Is that swamp cabbage?” he asked.

“You’ll have to land, so I can see it up close,” said Granny.

Navi-gator saw a small field and landed on it.

Granny climbed out of the plane and ran over to the cabbage. She felt the leaves of the plants, and shook her head.

“It’s just regular cabbage,” said Granny as she walked back to the plane.



“May I say something?” asked Baggy, who had come to life.

“Don’t interrupt, nephew,” said Granny.

“I’m here for swamp cabbage and I can’t win the prize at our county fair without it.”

Baggy shut his mouth and let her continue.

“Navi-gator!” she barked. “You keep flying and we’ll keep trying.”

Navi-gator taxied the biplane down the dirt road and they were airborne once again.

* * *

At the zoo, Lillia and Little Nipper were viewing the Gnus. They were rather homely beasts, with faces that had little or no expression.

“They look like unca Baggy when he wakes up in the morning and hasn’t had his swamp coffee,” said Little Nipper.

“Now, Nipper,” said Lillia, who thought it was a hilarious statement, but felt she should act as if she didn’t approve. “We need to move on, we have a lot of other animals to go see.”

Nipper saw a sign that pointed to the aquarium. It had a picture of a manatee on it. His name was Nosy.

“Can we go see Nosy the manatee?” asked Nipper, pointing to the sign.

“Well, I guess,” said Lillia. “The aquarium is a new addition to the zoo and even I haven’t seen it. So, let’s go!”

At the aquarium, downstairs, they could see through the windows what aquatic life was like under the surface of the water.

In his own tank, Nosy was entertaining the visitors by doing his theatrical show. He had on his black wig and sideburns, and his white sequined jacket decorated with rhinestones.

To the tune of 'Hound Dog,' Nosy was singing "I ain't nothing, but a Manatee, just bloopin' all the time."



Lillia and Little Nipper enjoyed the show and hung around to ask Nosy some questions.

"What do they feed you?" asked Nipper.

"Oh, I eat mostly vegetables," said Nosy, who had taken his wig off and was bald underneath. "I get lots of lettuce, and sometimes turnip greens."

"Do you have a favorite dish?" asked Lillia.

"Yes. Cabbage. I love cabbage. Mmmmmmmmm," said Nosy, as he closed his eyes and rubbed his tummy.

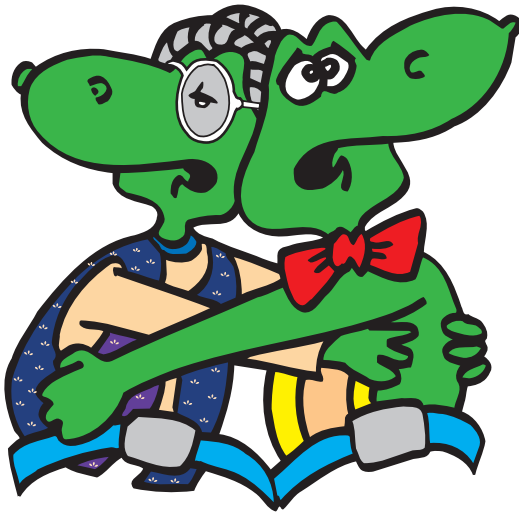
He began singing, "Cabbage in the morning, cabbage in the evening, cabbage at supper time."

Nipper and Lillia could see he wasn't paying any more attention to them, and was caught up in his visions of heads of cabbage. They tip-toed off and continued to see the other parts of the zoo.

Up in the sky, Navi-gator, Granny and Baggy were still flying around, looking for fields of cabbage that Granny could investigate.

Half the battle was keeping Navi-gator on course in his plane.

He kept flashing back to his World War I days, and began doing Loop-the-loops, which had Granny and Baggy in a panic, hanging on to each other.



Then, Navi-gator would zoom down to a herd of cows and chase them. He thought they were soldiers in disguise.

Finally, Granny got him back to his job of flying her around.

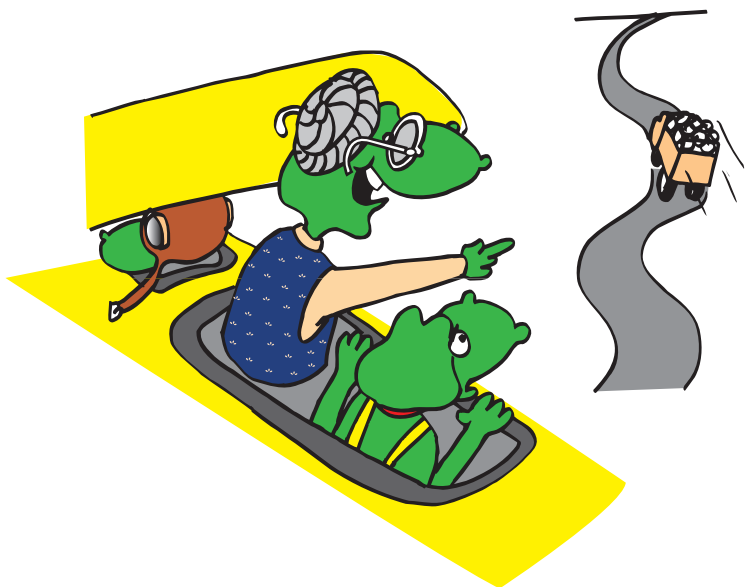
Navi-gator looked down at the highway and saw a truck carrying a big load of green objects. He swooped the plane down lower to get a better look.

The sign on the side of the truck said, 'Cabbage.'

"Look!" yelled Navi-gator, and pointed at the truck.

Granny leaned her head over the side and her eyes got big.

“Cabbage!” she screamed. “Yippee! Follow that truck!”



Baggy tried to help Granny out. He perked up.

“Uh, Granny, my reptile relation, do you mind if I say something?”

“Nephew, why is it that you jump into the scene only when the going gets good, and we’re onto something?” asked Granny. “If you have something to say, I wish you’d say it after I’ve finished my project. These interruptions only hold me up.”

Baggy eyes were too tired to do any more rolling. Instead, he went quiet, took a deep breath and shook his head, frustrated.

The cabbage truck made a turn into a big parking lot.

“Where’s the cabbage truck going?” asked Granny.

“It just pulled into the zoo. Probably to make a delivery.”

“Is there anything we can do?” asked Granny.

“There’s an empty field nearby. I could land and we could go see if it’s the right kind of cabbage,” said Navi-gator.

Granny didn’t hesitate to make an answer. “Do it,” she barked.

Navi-gator landed his plane and the three of them made their way towards the zoo. Granny paid the admission fee and soon they were wandering the grounds, hoping to find where they took the cabbage.

“Why don’t we ask someone?” suggested Baggy.

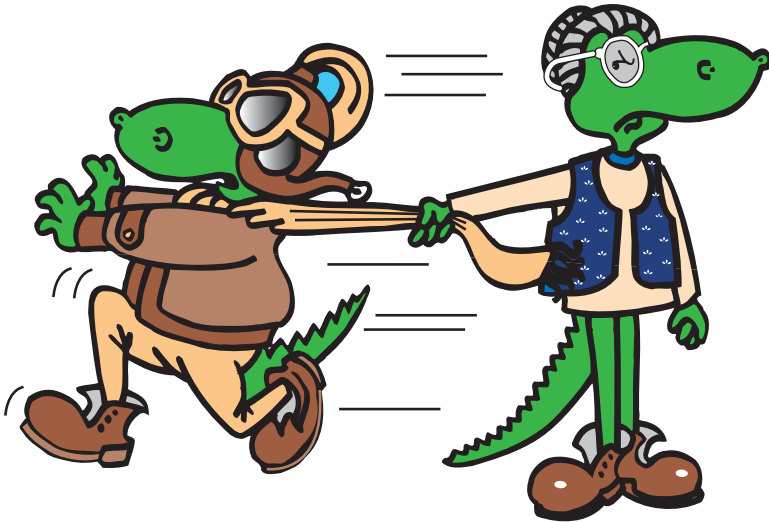
“Because we have to keep this secret. Nobody knows we’re here. Nobody knows who we are,” warned Granny.

Suddenly, over the loudspeakers throughout the zoo, they heard, “Baggy Gator, Granny Bootz, please report to the aquarium.”

The three froze in their tracks. They looked at each other with the most amazed expressions on their faces.

“How’d they know we were here?” asked Baggy.

“Well, they didn’t mention my name, so I’m outa here,” said Navi-gator, who turned and was about to run off. Granny grabbed him by his scarf.



“Hold on thar, Navi-gator,” said Granny. “The only way we’re gonna find out what’s going on is to go to the aquarium, like they said.”

They followed the signs until they came to the aquarium.

“Look,” said Navi-gator, “somebody’s waving to us.”



“It’s Little Nipper and Lillia,” remarked Baggy, relieved. “I forgot that they were going to the zoo.”

As they all met in front of Nosy’s pool, Baggy spoke up.

“Hey there, Nipper, Lillia. Was that you on the loudspeaker?” he asked.

“We saw you across the park, but couldn’t get your attention. So, I had you paged by one of the zookeepers,” said Lillia.

“Lillia, this is Granny Bootz, the relative I was waiting for,” said Baggy.

“Pleased to meet you,” roared Granny. “This is Navi-gator, and he’s flying us around trying to find some fresh cabbage for a recipe.”

“Well, if you want fresh cabbage, you came to the right place,” said Nipper.

“We know,” said Navi-gator. “I followed the truck that delivered it here.”

“But, what we can’t find,” said Granny, “is where they take the cabbage once it’s here.”

“Then why don’t you turn around?” said Lillia, smiling.

“Young lady, I don’t have much time for games,” yipped Granny.

“No, I’m not kidding,” said Lillia. “If you’ll turn around, you’ll see where the cabbage goes.”

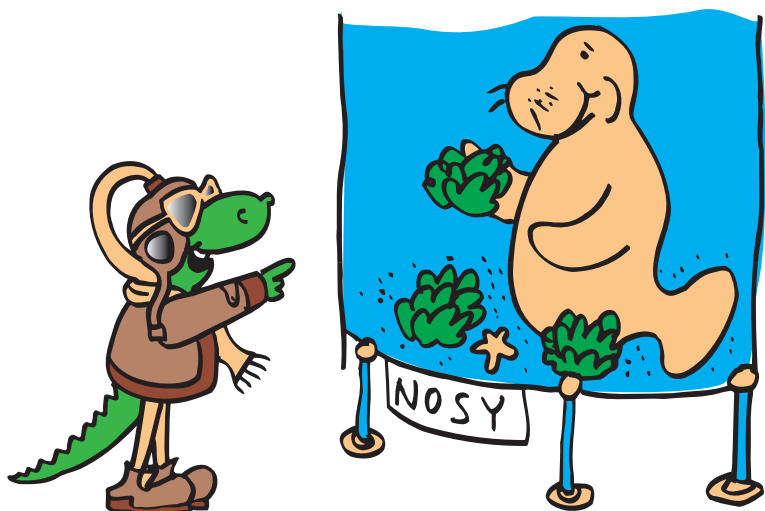
Granny turned and saw Nosy the Manatee, munching on a head of cabbage as he listened to their chatter.

“Well, I’ll be,” remarked Granny.

They all stood watching Nosy eat his cabbage.

“He’s making me hungry,” said Navi-gator.

“Hey, young fellow,” he called to Nosy, “or whatever you are, do you think I could have a head of some of that cabbage?”



“Sure,” said Nosy, and he threw a cabbage head over the side of his pool, into the hands of the anxiously waiting Navi-gator.

“Navi-gator!” roared Granny. “Don’t you dare eat that cabbage. After all we went through to get it. Don’t you dare!”

Navi-gator looked at the cabbage with a sad face, then handed it to Granny, smacking his lips.

"I guess that solves your problem of getting cabbage for your recipe," said Lillia.

"Swamp cabbage," corrected Granny.

"But, that's not swamp cabbage," said Lillia.

"It's just regular cabbage," said Little Nipper. "Ask Nosy."

"That's right," agreed Nosy. "They pick it fresh in a field, and bring it here to me."

"But my recipe calls for swamp cabbage!" yowled Granny, helplessly.

"Granny," said Baggy, "swamp cabbage isn't like regular cabbage. It comes from a palm tree called the Cabbage Palm. In the middle of the trunk, it's soft and edible. Good, too."

"For Pete's sake, why didn't you tell me? Why did you wait this long to say somethin'?" shouted Granny, who was steaming.



"But, Granny, I tried to tell you! That's what I was wanting to say, only you kept telling me to keep my mouth shut," said Baggy, backing away to make room for her coming explosion.

Granny didn't explode. She twisted her lips and almost crossed her eyes. She knew she had told him to keep quiet.

There was a long pause of silence as everyone looked at Granny, wondering what she was going to do.

Granny shrugged her shoulders. “Well, that’s that,” she said, dusting herself off. “At least we’ve narrowed it down.” She began heading for the zoo exit. “Let’s go get back in your plane, Navigator, and try to find a Cabbage Palm.”

“And we’ll see you later, Granny,” said Lillia. “Good luck.”

“Good luck, Granny,” said Nipper.

Granny, Baggy and Navigator went back to the biplane, climbed aboard and were soon back up in the sky.

Granny asked Baggy where they should go to find Cabbage Palms.

“I’m not sure,” said Baggy. “It’s not as if they grow them in groves, like oranges. Why don’t we let Navigator have a try at finding some?”

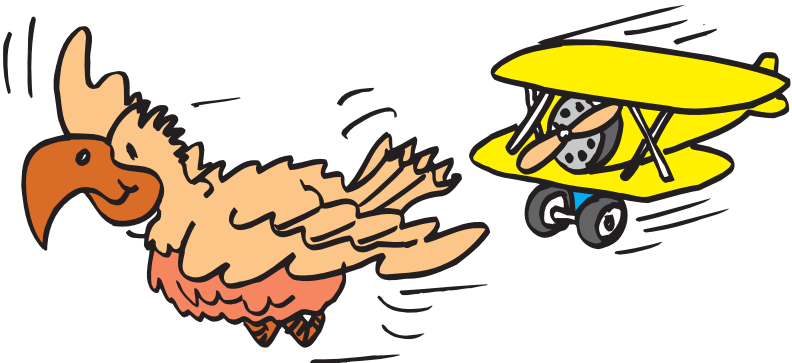
“Nephew, you amaze me sometimes. What could he possibly do? He still lives back in World War I,” complained Granny.

“Well, if you don’t mind my saying so, we haven’t had much success so far,” said Baggy.

Granny’s silence showed that she had no comeback to this statement. She leaned forward.

“Navigator,” she yelled, “go for it!”

His plane swooped and dipped and suddenly was following a big eagle, who was confidently flapping his wings, unaware that he was being tailed by a biplane.



“What are you doing?” screamed Granny.

“I’m using a little bit of strategy I used back during the war,” replied Navi-gator. “If you don’t know where you’re going, you find someone who looks like they do, and follow them. I’m following that eagle. He looks like he knows where he’s going.”

Navi-gator was right. The eagle glided down to a dead tree that had a large nest with his mate sitting in it.

Navi-gator pointed the nose of the plane downward, and drifted into a patch of land near the bird. He then jumped out of the cockpit, climbed to the ground and hurried over to the dead tree. Granny and Baggy were close behind.

Granny was sure he had gone off the deep end, and was about to grab him, when she stopped in her tracks.

“Well, I’ll be switched,” she cried.

“What’s wrong?” asked Baggy.

“Nothing’s wrong, nephew. Look next to that dead tree. A bunch of funny looking palm trees,” said Granny. “Do you think?”

“We’ll soon find out,” said Navi-gator, who had taken a pocketknife and began carving into the trunk of a palm. He soon reached the center that had a soft texture. He snipped out a chunk and handed it to Baggy, who tasted it.

Granny could see the look of amazement on his face.

“Swamp cabbage,” he remarked. “Honest-to-goodness swamp cabbage.”

“Cut me out a cupful, Navi-gator. That’s all I need for the recipe!” raved Granny, who was yelling “Hurray!” and dancing around the palm.

Navi-gator did so, and soon they were heading back to his swampy airport.



* * *

It was weeks later when Baggy received a letter from Granny, telling how her recipe did in the county fair recipe contest.

“Hello, nephew,” she began.

“Well, our efforts paid off. I made the batch of swamp juice and it was the hit of the county fair. I won First Prize, and a company is talking about bottling and selling it.

I want to thank you and Navi-gator for all your help. Pass it on to him, ya hear.

And, Baggy, nephew dear, don’t be so quiet for my next visit. Speak up, let it out. By keeping your mouth shut about swamp cabbage, you almost cost me a first prize.

So, take care, and I’ll see you next time.

Hugs & kisses, growls & hisses. . .

Granny”

The End